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The Kurds, the Four Wolves, and the Great Powers

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The Kurds of Syria. By Harriet Allsopp. London: Tauris, 2015.

The Kurds of Iraq: Nationalism and Identity in Iraqi Kurdistan. By Mahir A. Aziz. 2nd ed. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

Out of Nowhere: The Kurds of Syria in Peace and War. By Michael M. Gunter. London: Hurst, 2014.

The Kurds: A Modern History. By Michael M. Gunter. Princeton, NJ: Wiener, 2016.

Alien Rule. By Michael Hechter. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

Political Violence and Kurds in Turkey. By Mehmet Orhan. London: Routledge, 2015.

Kurds and the State in Iran: The Making of Kurdish Identity. By Abbas Vali. London: Tauris, 2014.

For centuries, the stereotype of a bandit nation attached to Kurds in both Western and Muslim travel literature. Deemed incurably tribal, they were described as scarcely civilized people who wore lightly the embrace of scripturalist Islam, preferring Sufis and saints to rigorous puritanism. Predatory nomadic clans who dominated the slopes of the

Zagros and plundered the plains beneath, they allegedly had no common language, or classical literature, and certainly no national solidarity; their warriors, brigands not guerrillas, were for sale, not for self-determination.¹ Nuri al-Said, the prime minister of Hashemite Iraq, infamously once explained how he intended to address a Kurdish rebellion—with gold. He paid off one tribe in order to check another in the vanguard of revolt, the Barzanis. Kurdish nationalist rebellions against Turkish, Persian, and Arab governments were frequently portrayed as looting expeditions. Ethnographers and historians, not just twentieth-century Turkish, Iranian, and Syrian governments, have denied that the Kurds constituted a singular nation, or possess any national consciousness.²

Today the emergent stereotypes in Western travelogues and blogs are very different. The Kurds are no longer periodically reviewed in *National Geographic* as a turbulently exotic premodern people. Michael Gunter, the doyen of Kurdish political studies in the United States, reports that both the *New York Times* and *National Geographic* have put the Kurdistan Region of Iraq high up in their “must-see” lists (2014, 53). Most recently, the Kurds have been hailed as an endangered species, democrats in the Middle East, and their male and female soldiers portrayed as plucky fighters for Western values (see, e.g., Shea 2016). The looting brigands of old have become today’s progressive pluralists, secular moderns, and feminist cosmopolitans, certainly by comparison with their neighbors. Down from the mountains they are hailed as the denizens of one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world (Schultz 2014), their women recognized as more educated than their Arab counterparts, with their bright dresses

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1. According to a long-forgotten scholarly authority, the Kurds are the “unsubdued scourge of the people of the plains” and divided into tribes and clans, “like those of medieval Scotland”—not disguised praise. No other race “had developed the marauding instinct to a higher degree than the warlike Kurd tribes” (Huntington 1909, 142). These descriptions, perhaps, are not too far from Abbas Vali’s account of the Kurds of Iran in the constitutional era (1905–7), among whom a national consciousness “did not exist”; the community displayed “striking political immaturity” and expressed its “glaring political backwardness and cultural isolation” (5, 116).

2. The latest edition of a noted British history of Iraq refers to “the Kurdish peoples” (Tripp 2007, 34). Detailed accounts of the diversity—and unity—of Kurds may be found in Izady (1992) and van Bruinessen (2000).

and uncovered heads forming a warm contrast to those who endure Salafist fashions.

Stereotypes should never be relied on, not least because they often reflect the bigotry of those who deploy them, including imperial usurpers. But group stereotypes are rarely entirely baseless. Even the author of *The Nature of Prejudice* accepted that stereotypes may contain a kernel of truth (Allport 1954, 195). In 1906 the average male Kurd likely had more martial skills and less primary and secondary education than the average Chaldean Christian, and in 2016 it is a good bet that Kurds are far more pro-Western in values and in their preferred political alliances than their larger neighbors (Arabs, Turks, and Persians).³ Seismic shifts in stereotypes signal important changes in intergroup relations, and a complete turnover in the stereotypes of an entire people over a century certainly warrants scrutiny.

The seven books surveyed here, except Hechter's, are focused on today's Kurds—three are revised doctoral theses (Allsopp, Aziz, and Orhan), and three are from two senior scholars (Gunter and Vali); they confirm that the changes reflect major endogenous transformations in the lives of Kurds, not just changes in how outsiders read (and use and abuse) them. The books are written by Kurds (Aziz, Vali), an author born in a village with a high proportion of Kurds but whose name does not tell his ethnicity (Orhan), and two Anglophone non-Kurds (Allsopp and Gunter), whereas Hechter, an internationally distinguished US sociologist, is best known for his insightful but varied trajectory on the interpretation of nationalism—he has been in the vanguard of both neo-Marxist and rational-choice understandings of nationalist mobilization. These books, individually and jointly, provide readers with an opportunity to see both the distinct and the interconnected trajectories of Kurds in the four polities in which they are mostly concentrated and an opportunity to appraise the prospects of their respective nationalisms on the eve of a referendum that may usher in an independent state that may be called the Republic of Kurdistan or South Kurdistan.

Gunter has briskly condensed his three decades of scholarly engagement into a précis that can safely be put into the hands of both the student and the diplomat.⁴ He confirms how slow the US State Department, under both the Bush and the Obama administrations, has been to shift its stereotyped dispositions toward Kurds and Kurdistan(s). When the United

States became what the French call a hyperpower, the State Department developed the doctrine that the territorial integrity of every state that existed in 1948, and their postcolonial successors, should be protected with the full repertoire of US diplomatic and hard power. Corollaries of this doctrine include the dogma that failed, fragmented, and destroyed states must be put back together, regardless of cost. Even if the Pentagon smashed the relevant state to pieces, US diplomats—and contractors—should glue together the shards and apply the well-established science of postconflict reconstruction. In this worldview, only mildly stereotyped here, Kurds remain unruly challengers to global order, even if no longer nomadic brigands. Whatever the long-term impact of ISIS on US policy may be, it has forced the begrudging recognition within the State Department that there are much worse challengers to planetary stability among the Kurds's neighbors and that defeating them requires alliances with Kurds—good Kurds and even bad Kurds.

Truly shifting State Department shibboleths regarding Kurdish matters will not be easy, however. After the fall of the shah, US policy makers decided that propping up a strong government in Baghdad was necessary to balance the novel and aggressive theocracy being constructed in Tehran. This response underpinned the subsequent “dual containment” of Iraq and Iran. The belief that a strong government in Baghdad was good for the United States—as well as for Iraqis—stubbornly survived the decisions by the two Presidents Bush to destroy Baghdad's conventional armed forces in 1991 and 2003.⁵ The dogma was, however, slightly amended after the removal of Saddam Hussein's regime. The emendation proclaimed that what was needed was a strongly centralized federal government—in which all would be “just Iraqis.”⁶ An equally deluded conviction was that a democratic and recentralized Iraq would be anti-Iranian. Quite why this would happen was never convincingly explained, even though it was obvious that the Shia constituted both a demographic and electoral majority and that their religious parties were going to be electorally popular. It seems to have been assumed that their pan-Iraqi identity would be paramount over their Shi'ite Iraqi identity. To these wishful thoughts was added another: the Kurds would consent to recentralization. Today the “One Iraq” policy of the State Department may be on its last legs, shredded of credibility.

3. This judgment may be inferred from the Pew Research Center (2014, 13–25).

4. Gunter's *The Kurds: A Modern History* is crisper and more up to date than the book that has deservedly held the field since it was first published in 1996 (i.e., McDowall 2004). Gunter's select bibliography and documentation are better. The best current political science introduction to Kurdish questions is found in Romano (2006).

5. This is not the place to review the merits of either Gulf War, but Aziz and Gunter suggest that the first led to the betrayal of both Kurdish and Shi'ite expectations of US support and thereby damaged the later prospects of US success in regime replacement.

6. The Baker-Hamilton recommendations would have recentralized Iraq (and repealed all the constitutional gains made by Kurds) and yet were self-described as “new.” See O'Leary (2007b).

The Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) negotiated the Constitution of Iraq to achieve a multinational and extensively decentralized federation—and believed that they had succeeded in doing so under the mediation of the one recent US ambassador with a Middle East formation, Zalmay Khalilzad. Subsequent US ambassadors, however, discouraged Kurds from allegedly “overreaching,” that is, admonished them not to exercise their rights ratified by the constitution of 2005—especially their rights to have their own security forces, oil and gas exploration, and licensing and export rights and to rectify the region’s southern border through plebiscites and the unwinding of Baathist settler colonial programs.⁷ Had the KDP and the PUK listened to US security advice, and the constitutional counsel of the State Department, the KRG would have been governed by ISIS after 2014.

The member states of the European Union (EU) updated their perspectives almost as slowly as the US State Department. Most first began to think significantly about Kurds and Kurdistan in the early 1990s—after Gulf War 1; the failed Kurdish rebellion against Saddam Hussein; mass-refugee flight into Turkey and Iran; the establishment of a safe haven in what was delicately disguised as “northern Iraq”; and the subsequent emergence of a *de facto* autonomous Kurdistan, triggered by Saddam Hussein withdrawal of Iraqi revenues and services in an effort to starve the Kurds into submission. European foreign offices began more serious reflection when Turkey was promoted to the status of a candidate member of the EU in 1999. The monitoring of human and minority rights then became both a condition for determining Turkey’s accession and a means to block it. But it also emerged that the southeastern border of the EU might in the future pass through historic Kurdistan. Today Kurdish questions are part of refugee questions.⁸

7. Article 121 (5) of the Constitution of 2005 granted regions the right to have their own police, security forces, and guards; Article 110 excluded the federal government from having any exclusive powers over oil and gas ownership, management, and exploitation (compare it with the Transitional Administrative Law’s Article 25); Article 111 assigned ownership of oil and gas to all the people in all the regions and governorates (not the federal government); and Articles 115 and 121 (2) provided for regional legal supremacy on all matters outside of the exclusive powers of the federal government, which did not include any powers over oil and gas or the exporting of goods and services (Iraqi Council of Representatives, Iraqi Constitution, <http://www.parliament.iq>). See also Gailbraith (2006, 191ff.), McGarry and O’Leary (2007), and O’Leary (2007a).

8. General Philip M. Breedlove, NATO’s Supreme Allied Commander, Europe, told the House Armed Services Committee of the US Congress in February 2016 that “Russia and the Assad regime are deliberately weaponizing migration from Syria in an attempt to overwhelm European structures and break European resolve” (Ferdinando 2016). He did not remark

THE FOUR WOLVES AND KURDISH QUESTION(S)

All the authors treat Kurdish politics within each of the four major polities that Kurdish nationalists call the “four wolves,” namely, Iraq, Syria, Turkey, and Iran.⁹ Two of the wolves, typically described as vicious in the same stereotype, are now deeply lamed, namely, Iraq and Syria. The Baathist Iraqi wolf would be certified as dead had it not morphed into the ISIS werewolf—the so-called Islamic State is the latest and most explosive cocktail of Baathism and political Sunni Islam, now joined with many of the Sunni Arabs of Syria (see esp. Cockburn 2015). By contrast, the two big wolves, Turkey and Iran, are not lame. Kurdish nationalists usually caricature Turkey as powerful and dangerous but predictable, less politely naming it the clumsiest, thickest, and most rigid of the four wolves. After all, Turkish governments spent decades calling the Kurds “Mountain Turks,” even though no tour guides ever reported that Turkish-speaking hikers in the Zagros suddenly lost their fluency in the mother of all languages.¹⁰ Completing the typology of wolves is the most cunning, manipulative, and unscrupulous, Iran. Evidence for the Iranian regime’s Machiavellian skills is its current control of its Kurds: Gunter (2016) describes their status in a chapter subtitled “Temporarily Quiescent?”—and that succinctly conveys his argument. Vali writes similarly that “the Kurdish question in Iran [is] no longer an expression of discontent by a minority on the cultural periphery of Iranian politics, but [is] rather its silent center, constantly pulsating, questioning the political unity and ethnic identity of the sovereign power” (136). For him, the Kurds linguistic and ethnic identity prove that Iran’s claim to be a nationally unified republic is fraudulent.

All the authors are likely correct to suggest that there are four distinct Lesser Kurdistan questions rather than just one Greater Kurdistan question. In his survey of Kurdish students in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, Aziz, for example, reports that while 90% favored the independence of the region from Iraq, less than 2% also favored joining up with “the other three parts of Kurdistan” (table 8.6., 135).¹¹ Important qualifications, however, are required to the thought that there is no

on the Kurdish presence among the refugees; the Turkish government’s use of mass flight as leverage against EU and US positions (which, by contrast with Ankara’s, prioritize the defeat of ISIS over the removal of the Assad regime); or the EU’s desperation to pay Turkey to warehouse as many refugees as possible, pending the (promised) restabilizations of Iraq and Syria, even if that breaks international law.

9. There were Kurds in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and the Caucasus Republics in the Soviet Federation (see Müller 2000), and some remain within the Russian Federation where “Kurdology” may well still be stronger than anywhere else.

10. For scholarly analysis and light relief on Turkish language policies, see Lewis (1999).

11. The survey dates back to 2007.

Greater Kurdistan question: organizational, sentimental, and policy oriented.

The Kurdistan Workers Party, the Partîya Karkerên Kurdistan (PKK), is organized in a pan-nationalist mode, even though it has abandoned the goal of an independent Greater Kurdistan. Among its numerous front organizations, the Democratic Union Party, the Partîya Yekîti ya Dêmkokrat (PYD), is the PKK's franchise operation in Syria, while the Free [Independent] Life Party of Kurdistan, the Partîya Jiyani Azadi Kurdistan (PJAK), is its equivalent in Iran. The PKK has no significant front organization within Iraq, but it has bases in the Qandil mountains, from which it periodically launches attacks into Turkey and in which it is periodically struck by Turkish armed forces. The KRG opposes the use of violence by the PKK against Turkey, and vice versa,¹² but it does not have the resources to shut off the passage of militants in either direction—the formidable terrain still matters. Not only is the PKK organized in a pan-Kurdish fashion, but it has often sought to achieve monopolistic control over other Kurdish parties and organizations, and with extreme violence, as Orhan documents. The PKK has fought both the KDP and the PUK, particularly the former, usually whenever the two parties seem vulnerable. The KDP in the KRG was itself once organized in pan-Kurdish fashion. There were and are KDPs in Syria (exhaustively treated by Allsopp), in Turkey (which do not participate in Turkish elections), and in Iran, the residuum of which is based in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq—usually restrained by tacit diplomatic agreements between the KRG and Iran. And in all four of the wolves, microparties proclaim their adherence to a Greater Kurdistan, hoping that one day Kurds will rally to their organization.

Sentiment for a Greater Kurdistan is manifest in all four parts of historic Kurdistan and in the Kurdish diaspora. Flags, banners, maps, songs, poetry, novels, broadcasting, and film advertise this identification. The sentiment crosses the Kurmanji-Sorani difference in dialect and religious differences among Kurds—Sunni, Shiite, Alevi, Yazidi, Christian, Sabean-Mandean, Shabak, Kakai's, and secular. It is manifest in the Kurdish names of the Lesser Kurdistans: *Rojava Kurdistanê* (where the sun sets) is western Kurdistan (northern Syria); *Bakurê Kurdistanê* is northern Kurdistan (southeast Turkey); *Başûrê Kurdistanê* (southern) Kurdistan is the Kurdistan Region of Iraq; and *Rojhilatê Kurdistanê* (where the sun rises) is eastern Kurdistan (the northwestern border region of Iran).¹³ Across the four polities that repress them or try to contain them, Kurds read and listen to each other's media,

legal or otherwise, and watch one another's political spaces. As all the authors document, at particular junctures Kurds are inspired across pan-Kurdish space by particular leaders, movements, and their strategies. The leadership of the general cause has been disputed, but from 1961 until 1975 it was definitely held by Mulla Mustafa Barzani's KDP (Orhan, 42). During the Iranian revolution, Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou of the KDP of Iran had a brief moment of glory.¹⁴ From 1984 until 1996 Abdullah Öcalan's PKK captured the longings of Kurds in many places, but after 2003 and until 2013 the vanguard role returned to the KDP under the leadership of Mas'ud Barzani, his nephew Nechirvan, his son Masrour, and the late Sami Abdul-Rahman. The PUK, under the leadership of Jalal Talabani, Kosrat Rasoul, Fuad Masoum, and Barham Salih, has shared this limelight—until the party suffered a major split in 2009, with the formation of *Gorran* ("Change"). Today the PKK's Syrian branch, the PYD, co-led by Salih Muslim, fills the spotlight, especially among the Kurdish diaspora. Gunter asks whether the Kurds of Syria will pursue either the PKK or the KRG model (Gunter 2016, chaps. 5 and 6). This is the pertinent question, which we might gloss as the choice between permanent revolution (PKK) or experimenting with federalism or confederalism (the KRG), while maintaining the option of secession.

The general point is that pan-Kurdish sentiment provides both resources and constraints for Kurdish parties and organizations. Allies, funds, sanctuaries, and strategic ideas are the obvious resources; the constraints are usually double-edged. Pan-Kurdish sentiment conditions and increases the suspicions of their Turkish, Iranian, and Arab neighbors. However, the pursuit of Kurdish collective or party interests within each of the Lesser Kurdistans sometimes takes place at the expense of other Kurds, posing normative constraints and unpalatable choices. During the Iran-Iraq War both the KDP and the PUK, to keep Iranian bases and support, at different times helped Khomeini to defeat the KDP of Iran, which had the active support of Baathist Iraq—on the principle that my enemy's enemy is my ally (Aziz, 77).¹⁵ Similarly, the PKK's Öcalan supported the Syrian Baathist regime's claim that most of the Kurds in Syria were refugees and migrants from Turkey, who would benefit from returning home (Allsopp, 40). In return for this betrayal of the rights of those Kurds who had been stripped of their citizenship, the Baath

12. Its policy is to promote a peaceful and democratic resolution of the Kurdish question in Turkey.

13. *Herêmi/Herêm* are regional/region, respectively.

14. He was later assassinated by Iranian agents in Vienna; his life and death are the subject of Prunhuber (2009).

15. In these murky years, the PUK shifted from being allies of the KDP-I and of Baghdad, back into being an Iranian ally. The party leaders' conduct makes most sense when read as an attempt to displace the KDP from being the principal Kurdish player within Iraqi Kurdistan.

regime gave Öcalan a free hand to recruit Syrian Kurds to fight for the PKK in Turkey. And in its latest renewal of war on the government of Turkey, the PKK has cut oil and gas pipelines—including new ones—that run from within the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and Kirkuk to Turkish refineries and ports. That it vehemently denies it has done so demonstrates the normative constraint. The fact that it is willing to cut the lifelines of the independent energy policy of the KRG—in order to damage Turkey—speaks volumes for its party-centered ruthlessness. These stories reflect the deep structure of the Kurds' collective predicament, namely, that other Kurds are often the collateral damage of Kurdish party interests. In September 2014, President Barzani told the best English-language newspaper in the Kurdistan Region that “the defense of the land and the people of Kurdistan is the duty of all of us and would override all other duties.”¹⁶ Making his statement at the height of ISIS's expansion, he was calling for a pan-Kurdish front: no Kurdish leader could stand idly by and see the PYD exterminated by ISIS and, more important, Kurdish civilians massacred or enslaved. But such statements, moments, and follow-up actions are abnormal. The norm is interparty competition and distinct politics within each of the four zones of Kurdistan.

Nevertheless, both the great and the neighboring powers fear a Greater Kurdistan, real or imagined, and sometimes act accordingly. Until the Justice and Development Party, *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (AKP), government in Turkey consolidated its detente with the KRG in 2007—and went on to establish a consulate in Erbil in 2011—Turkish governments had generally refused to recognize, aid, or exploit Kurdish organizations or autonomy settlements.¹⁷ The US State Department and its EU counterparts, prioritizing their NATO alliance with Turkey, usually have deferred to Turkey's fears. But these seemed to recede under the successive premierships of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (2002–11). Under politicians driven by political Islam rather than Kemalist nationalism, Turkey started to accommodate Kurds. The AKP won votes among socially conservative Kurds who opposed the PKK, both because of its Marxist-Leninist provenance and because of its sustained violence against traditional elites and traditional Kurdish culture.¹⁸ The AKP government lifted the most egregious bans on Kurdish culture and language and seemed intent on distinguishing good Kurds from bad ones. The good publicly came to include the KDP-led Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

16. *Rûdaw*, September 19, 2014. This paper is very close to the KDP but consistently has some of the best writing and reporting.

17. Turkey has bases within the Kurdistan Region, dating to treaties with Saddam Hussein, which allow its soldiers to engage in hot pursuit of the PKK, but the Baghdad government does not recognize them.

18. Its militant feminism simultaneously attracts modernized young women and loses traditionalist Kurdish support to the AK party.

Erdoğan jointly opened his government's consulate with President Barzani—dressed for the occasion in his Peshmerga uniform. Turkey has been the principal source of foreign and direct investment in the KRG—business had long preceded the Turkish foreign ministry. The bad Kurds were the PKK and its subunits; although, remarkably, the AKP government was prepared to negotiate with the PKK.¹⁹ The question ahead is whether Syrian developments have retriggered Turkey's neuralgic anxieties and returned Ankara's ministries to the previously implacable postures of Kemal Atatürk. Alternatively put, will Turkey's entente with the KDP in the KRG be a casualty of the renewal of the war with the PKK? The follow-on question is whether the United States and the EU will follow their traditional alignments with Ankara—come what may.

Read together, these books show what can happen when great powers, and the four wolves, try to manage national, ethnic, and sectarian conflicts within policy silos based on treating each state separately. The Kurds are not alone in their predicaments. Spillovers of policy often blowback and render overall policy incoherent. The United States is Turkey's NATO ally; jointly they define the PKK as a terrorist organization, and the PKK has indeed practiced terrorism (i.e., the deliberate killing of civilians for political purposes), as Orhan documents. Immediately across the Turkish border in Syria, however, the United States has actively armed and fought alongside the *Yekîneyên Parastina Gel* (YPG; translated variously as the “People's Protection Units” or the “Popular Protection Units” and by Allsopp as the “People's Defense Units”). The United States treats the YPG as an ally against ISIS—the YPG furnished the heroes and heroines of the defeat of ISIS in Kobanê, a Kurdish-majority city on the Syria-Turkey border. But the YPG is the militia of the PYD, which Allsopp and Gunter leave us in no doubt is one of the family of organizations set up by the PKK. The PYD, with the YPG as its armed fist, has sought to establish a political monopoly in Syrian Kurdistan, behind a banner of “democratic autonomy,” of which more anon. The PYD has tried to exclude the potential influence of other Syrian Kurdish parties, who mostly look to the KDP of Iraq for guidance and support. Yet both the United States and the KRG ended up supporting the YPG in the battle for Kobanê, and the Turkish government reluctantly permitted the good Kurds of the KDP to help the bad Kurds of the YPG defeat ISIS because that is what the United States wanted, although no doubt it sought side payments.

The contradictions do not end here. The United States is an adversary of Iran, notwithstanding recent detente over nuclear programs under the Obama administration. But in

19. Gunter (2016, 52–57) tracks the stalled peace process until 2014.

Iraq the two are de facto allies against ISIS, and both came to the aid of the KRG when it appeared that Erbil might fall to ISIS. In Syria, by contrast, adversarial relations between the United States and Iran appear to operate. Iran backs the incumbent regime, while the United States under Obama backed “the opposition” (i.e., the largely Sunni opposition that is not in the Al-Nusra Front or ISIS). But, as Allsopp and Gunter report, in the summer of 2012 the Syrian regime deliberately withdrew from its Kurdish-majority “cantons” of the northwest, north, and northeast. The policy was to allow the PYD, including its capable coleader Salih Muslim and the YPG, to flourish in order to weaken the opposition (which the United States supported). The US support for the YPG therefore—unintentionally—aids the Assad regime’s survival strategy, with the approval of Tehran, and creates major headaches with the Turkish government. From one perspective, it looks as if the Syrian, Iranian, and US governments, lately joined by the Russians, are backing Kurdish Marxists against Sunni Islamist Syrians in ISIS. From another angle, the Turks, joined by the Saudis and the Gulf states, back all Sunni Arabs in Syria against heterodox Syrian Muslims who have set loose Kurdish Marxists upon the plains people of northern Syria. The United States currently resolves these headaches with a fiction: the PYD and the YPG are not the PKK. Policy may try to make that a future fact; it is not, however, a current fact, although it may be a noble lie. Encouraging the PYD to disassociate itself from the PKK and to pursue federal or confederal autonomy within a reconstructed Syria would relax the contradictions in US policy and perhaps relax the Turkish government—if that is still possible.

Discerning rationality in the Trump administration’s foreign policy toward Syria and Iraq is to pursue a mythical object. But emphatic antipathy to Iran is evident, and several US generals, notably Ernie Audino (2017) and Jay Garner (2017), have been openly arguing that supporting an independent Kurdistan is in US strategic interests. They observe that the Kurds are reliably pro-American and anti-ISIS and that ISIS (and its possible successors) cannot be permanently defeated in the region without the assistance of Kurds. They insist that US policy in Iraq has failed: Iran now controls the Shiite-majority government in Baghdad and, crucially, controls Shiite militias (Popular Mobilization Forces) that operate outside Baghdad’s authority. Continuing support for “one Iraq” amounts to supporting an Iranian proxy state. The territory controlled by the KRG represents the last terrain blocking Iranian preeminence in an arc from Tehran to Baghdad to Damascus and Beirut. Garner (2017, 24) strikingly describes the space of a would-be independent Kurdistan: “Our enemy Iran is to their east; their puppet Iraq is to their south; our enemy Syria is to their west; and Turkey, a NATO ally, is to

their north, which would give us excellent lines of communication.” The successful export of Kurdish oil and gas reserves, especially the latter, through Turkey would jointly weaken the latter’s reliance on Russia for energy supplies and reduce Russian blackmail power over the EU. Such analysis bolsters the advocates of Kurdistan’s prospective secession from Iraq, but without Turkish cooperation the logistics of support for a US base in Kurdistan would be complicated.

KURDS OF SYRIA: OUT OF NOWHERE?

Portraits of the Kurds of Syria, among the least well-known and studied of the Kurds in the west and the last to engage in armed rebellion, may be found in Allsopp and Gunter.²⁰ Before the Syrian civil war began in 2011, Kurds were variously estimated to constitute between 8% and 15% of Syria’s pre-war population (i.e., about 1.8 and 3.5 million people). A figure of 2 million errs on the side of caution. They speak Kurmanji, the dialect used by most of their coethnics in Turkey and in Dohuk and parts of the Erbil governorate in Iraq. Most are Sunni Muslims, although there are some Yazidis, who have suffered genocide and female enslavement at the hands of ISIS. Historically they have been concentrated in three discontinuous places in northern Syria, namely,

- i) The northeastern corner of Syria, which is becoming fully contiguous with the Kurdistan Region of Iraq as the KDP-Peshmerga recovers full control of the Sinjar region, is to the west of Mosul. That generates anxiety among Turks. This area has been Kurdish majority since official records began in the last century. The encompassing Syrian governorate is called al-Hasaka (formerly Jazira) and had a pre-civil-war population of over 1.5 million people. Kurdish and Christian coexistence has generally been long-standing here.
- ii) The Kobanê (*Ain al-Arab* to Arabs) district is in the northeast of the Aleppo governorate, in north-central Syria, and had a population of roughly 200,000 in 2004. Accounts vary on how many have fled to Turkey (or the Kurdistan Region of Iraq) before, during, and after the full battle between ISIS and the YPG. As many as 100,000 may have evacuated this area.
- iii) The most northerly and western part of Syria, a mountainous outcrop of the Anatolian plateau, the Efrîn (*Afrîn* in Arabic) district, had a population of about 175,000 in 2004. Ethnographically the Kurds

20. A slightly older but very useful account may be found in Tejel (2009).

here are indistinguishable from the Kurds of Turkey and unquestionably in their homeland. They are also closest to what has been the most violent front in the civil war.

Outside of these three areas, people of Kurdish origin, many of whom have linguistically assimilated into Arabic, are found in all the major cities of Syria, especially Damascus, which has had Kurds since Saladin's time. The military question, pregnant with unanswered political implications, is whether the PYD/YPG has the will and capability to link and hold the three previously discontinuous territories in the north. Turkey has opposed this vista. To what extent if any will Turkey be willing to accommodate any kind of second autonomous Kurdistan being established on its southern border? The US and the Russian governments have so far sought to restrain the PYD/YPG and have strong incentives to deter a Turkish intervention. The PYD denies that it has a nationalist project and emphasizes that the YPG includes all minorities—and women—in its ranks. The latter claim is true, but few outside its ranks believe the former.

Allsopp confirms that Kurds have been in what is now Syria since Ottoman times, and before, but a significant (unquantifiable) portion descend from refugees from Turkey, who fled or sought asylum from Kemalist repression in the 1920s and the 1930s or who became economic refugees before and after World War II. Under Syrian Baathist rule, these refugees were denied citizenship rights, and this policy of citizenship denial was then extended to many other indigenous Kurds. When Assad the younger got into major trouble in 2011, he granted citizenship to undocumented Kurds, and their descendants, both to bolster his regime and to divide his opposition, which has played its Kurdish cards less skillfully. The opposition made no significant overtures to the Kurds, for example, to recognize Kurdish or to grant territorial autonomy in one or more cantons or governorates. Instead it promised a banal formula, equal citizenship in a civic state, exactly what Kemalist Turkey had promised their refugee forebears.²¹ Some of the Syrian Arab opposition would appear to have learned nothing and forgotten nothing from previous and neighboring conflicts with Kurds.

The Syrian KDP was founded in 1957 on a platform of cultural rights and democracy for the entire country.²² It strongly opposed the brief pan-Arabist union of Egypt and Syria.

During the last days of the Sublime Porte, Kurds had mostly been pro-Ottoman rather than allies of Arab nationalists, although there were exceptions. Under the subsequent French mandate, Kurds were overrepresented in the security forces: Paris deliberately used minorities in auxiliaries to crush Arab nationalists. That is why there were many senior soldiers with Kurdish backgrounds among Syria's first postcolonial dictators, even though the last of these, Adib Shishaki, favored an Arab-Muslim nation-state. It also helps explain the gradual, and for a while the total, exclusion of Kurds from the Syrian army and party politics under the Baath: there was no place for Kurds within Syrian Arabism; the Kurds were either foreigners or traitors or both, and *linguicide* became policy. Baath plans soon extended to building an "Arab belt," expelling Kurds living within 15 kilometers of Syria's borders with Turkey and Iraq. The project was never completed, partly because not enough Arabs could be persuaded to settle. Syrian "Arabization," although no less malevolent or racist, was less effective than its Iraqi equivalent under Saddam Hussein (Allsopp, 24–28, 234 n. 3). Elsewhere in Syria Kurds were eventually allowed to find employment in the lower ranks of the security forces—leading some to become regime loyalists and to acquire military skills, although no longer at senior officer level. Kurdish units, for example, were used to crush the Muslim Brotherhood in Hama in early 1982.

Sunni Arabs and Kurds in Syria therefore have antagonistic relations, even though both have ties of religion and joint experience of oppression by the Alawite-dominated Assad regime. The bulk of the Sunni Arab opposition has not moved to build bridges with the Kurds, most of whom regard Syrian Sunni Arabs as having added Islamist fanaticism to their traditional pan-Arab racism. Minimally, Kurds want clear protections for their cultural rights; maximally, they want a territorially unified entity within a federally or confederally reconstructed Syria.

Kurdish nationalists not organized in the PKK have long been disorganized by the Syrian intelligence services and, not least, by their own lack of unity: the most accurate maxim of Kurdish politics is that the greatest enemy of the Kurds is other Kurds. Most of the Syrian Kurdish parties were established by notables and treated as their hereditary assets: they have rarely attracted support across all three enclaves, they have often relied on tribal and kinship affiliations, and they have been deeply fissiparous. In the 1990s David McDowall listed no less than 15 political parties in Syria that sought to represent Kurdish interests (2004, 484); as of March 2014, Allsopp lists 21. The taxonomizing of these parties and their actions before spring 2011 are at the heart of Allsopp's field research (ix–xii, 72–175), which also usefully documents their efforts to form coalitions, pre- and post-2011.

21. Vali complains that the Iranian opposition to the incumbent theocracy follows a similar policy toward the Kurds of Iran: "Republican . . . democracy *à la* France is simply no answer to the political, juridical and cultural problems sustaining and reproducing the Kurdish question in Iran" (137).

22. In all four zones of Kurdish space, the KDP party family popularized the slogan "Democracy for [fill in the country], autonomy for Kurdistan."

The Syrian Baath and Turkish governments had border disputes, including over the use of the Euphrates. One was the ardent opponent of Israel, the other its ally, and the two states were on opposite sides of Cold War alliances. Partly in consequence, the elder Assad hosted the PKK when its leader fled Turkey in 1980 and numerous other Kurdish leftist and nationalist forces from outside Syria. Cooperation between the Syrian Baath and the PKK ended only in the late 1990s when the Turks mobilized an army on the Syrian border and demanded Öcalan's extradition. Syria withdrew its active support for the PKK, and Öcalan went into exile, before eventually being handed over to the Turkish authorities after his capture in Kenya (with US assistance). When Assad junior got into trouble, he went back to his father's ways: letting the PKK reemerge (in the form of the PYD), intending to deter, punish, or distract Turkey, especially by creating a fresh front in the rear of the Syrian opposition. These aims have been met. Assad has not, however, recognized the autonomy proclaimed by the PYD and has likely lost control of those whom he hoped to make his clients.

The Kurds of Syria have therefore not come from nowhere, but their lineage is fractious and their future highly uncertain. If the Assad regime emerges victorious from the civil war, it may co-opt the Kurds with some minimal cultural and territorial rights because it will have to rebuild its power largely through a coalition of minorities—Alawites, Druze, Christians, and Kurds, along with co-opted Sunnis or opponents of Sunni Islamism. By contrast, if the opposition eventually wins, whether the relevant Sunni Arabs wear Islamist or civic republican masks (or both), expulsion is the Kurds likeliest fate. A sustained stalemate and negotiated end to the Syrian civil war may thereby suit the Kurds best—enabling institutionalization of their gains. To survive, the Kurds of Syria will need allies, but whom can they trust, and who will trust them? The PYD has reversed Öcalan's previous stance—whatever the daily changes in verbiage—and now stands for territorial autonomy for Syrian Kurdistan and equal citizenship rights for Kurds.

Independent reports of the PYD's rule have not suggested havens of political pluralism—Kurds from other parties have been imprisoned—but reliable sources are not plentiful, and there are no reports of *gross* abuses of human rights. Gunter (2014, 122–28) provides a brief discussion of “democratic autonomy” as espoused by the PYD and inspired by Öcalan. To any historian this idea reruns the isocratic tradition in communism—egalitarian and hierarchy-free statelessness, conciliar participatory democracy, the rule of the people over experts, and the replacement of bureaucracy by citizens who practice self-administration. Differently put, it is the recurrent anarchic vision of the abolition of the division of labor

in politics. Such self-organizing communities (communes or soviets) have emerged in many revolutions but rarely last long, especially in war zones. Stateless self-organization may especially appeal to Kurds who have no (fully independent) state of their own, especially those in Turkish jails,²³ but those who are more realistic will seek a state or states of their own (or within a more conventional conception of a confederation). Gunter observes that while Leninist doctrine promotes the smashing of the state, actual Marxist-Leninist vanguard parties rarely tolerate other parties when they come to power and usually move to become dictators. Among the items for the crowded agenda of any future peace congress on Syria, therefore, will be not just the protection of Kurds, Kurdish-speaking Yazidis, and other microminorities but the multiparty democratization of the Kurdish spaces and a genuine and verifiable decoupling of the PYD's organization from that of the PKK. The PYD's feminism, secularism, and inclusiveness win some deserved plaudits in the West, but the fiction of no-party government passes no credibility tests.

Any feasible negotiated settlement of Syria will have to take either a federal or confederal form, based on the Alawite, Druze, and Christian zones of concentration in the east, the Sunni Arab areas in the south and middle of the country, and the Kurdish-dominated areas of the north. No such settlement will be viable if it is based on simple majority rule within a powerful federal government. The Assad regime, and all the ethnic and religious minorities, will reject such proposals. Some hope for progress may rest in the disarray of Turkey's Syrian policy, which desperately needs constructive amendment, especially because Russia (and Iran) have successfully blocked the defeat of the Assad regime.²⁴ Turkey had previously allowed all Islamists to cross its borders when it was resolved to bring about Assad's demise but has sowed the wind that produced ISIS. With their fingers burned through blowback can Turkey's leaders withdraw from a reckless policy and be reengaged on a better platform? The immediate future is likely one of numerous cease-fires, cessations of hostilities, and their breakdown, but considering con/federal reconstruction warrants further inspection. Its supreme

23. In the first volume of his prison writings, Öcalan sees Sumerian civilizations as the foundation of all repressive hierarchies, including that of men over women. Statelessness is the solution, and feminism and democratic autonomy the means, to reverse what was built in Mesopotamia (Öcalan 2007). The genesis of these writings is something of a mystery, given the author's imprisonment and the obscure description of the editorial team's role.

24. The deliberate shooting down of a Russian plane in November 2015 was extraordinarily risky. Turkey has lost most wars it has fought with Russia since the eighteenth century and had little reason to believe that its allies would support it, unless it was attacked. This action led many Western governments to question Turkey's rationality (see Hallinan 2015).

merit for traditional foreign offices is that it would preserve the exterior boundary of the old Syria. But con/federalizing Syria prompts at least three tricky questions. Can US, European, Russian, Iranian, and Turkish diplomats cooperate with Syrian Kurds and Arabs? No such settlement could function without Sunni Arab partners—they are the demographic majority—but who are they to be, how are they to be organized, and with what international sponsors?²⁵ A settlement that confines the Assad family to western Syria may be possible, but how will a Bosnia writ-large settlement be implemented without international peacekeeping forces? Even to raise such questions seems visionary, but what other kind of settlement is possible? The answer is twofold: the breakup of Syria or a renewal of the fight to the finish to control it, and these are very close equivalents in their consequences. Differently put, the answer is more refugees.

GOING SOMEWHERE: THE KRG OR THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH KURDISTAN?

Mahir Aziz demonstrates the existence of a long-standing Kurdish identity and that there is a powerful constituency for independence among the best educated Kurds in the KRG, whom he surveyed in 2007.²⁶ Today their heartfelt preference is on the regional and international agenda, placed there by President Barzani, originally when the federal Iraqi army collapsed in Mosul in the summer of 2014. The referendum is now scheduled for September 25, 2017, supported by 15 of the KRG's 17 parties. Critics accuse Barzani of being engaged in diversionary politics: the KRG has a major fiscal crisis, like most oil-dependent polities; a domestic constitutional crisis (the region's draft constitution has not been ratified because of continuing interparty disputes over the respective powers of the presidency and parliament); and relations between Baghdad and Erbil are poisonous, although still largely peaceful.²⁷ The three-party coalition government in Erbil was reduced to two when Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani removed the Gorran party from office after some of its key leaders and cadres organized riots against the KDP. President Barzani's term of office has expired, so he is effectively a caretaker until

the interparty and constitutional crisis is resolved. (He has only the thin veneer of a legal opinion without obvious standing to support his emergency status.)²⁸

Others do not focus on internal KRG politics, however, and speculate that Barzani wishes to lead the region to independence to complete his life's work before stepping down: he has committed to not standing again. All such accounts tend to underplay Baghdad's sustained violations of the Constitution of Iraq as an explanation of the determination to have a referendum. Key transitional provisions, especially those affecting the "disputed territories," have not been implemented; Iraq has neither a federal second chamber nor the federal supreme court specified in the constitution; efforts to create federal regions from provinces, as permitted by the constitution, have been unlawfully and coercively blocked; the work of numerous independent public bodies has been either suborned or subverted. Supporters of the referendum insist that a permanent constitution that is permanently violated cannot bind anyone and that a voluntary union that was ratified by referendum may and will be voluntarily dissolved by referendum.

The cynical explanations of the drive toward a referendum also forget the Kurds's reaction to the threat of ISIS.²⁹ After the Iraqi federal army fled from its positions in Mosul and the "disputed territories," Kurds made all the territorial gains they had ever sought, but then the KRG itself was imperiled. The big lesson was very simple: Kurds could not rely on security from Baghdad. Not only were they left in the lurch to face ISIS in charge of an arsenal originally supplied by the United States to the Iraqi army, but Baghdad insisted on inspecting any arms sent to the Peshmerga in the midst of ISIS's major moment of territorial expansion. The Kurdish leadership determined that they needed to strengthen the Peshmerga forces, to refocus on achieving cohesion within their own institutions, and that they needed to break free of Baghdad's use of oil-revenue allocations to blackmail them. All Kurds were as-

25. The Syrian opposition's bargaining power is very limited; Sunni Arab numbers have been diminished by mass flight, and the Trump administration has ended US support for the so-called moderate opposition. Some among the Sunni opposition who are not Islamists have recognized that the failure to provide credible commitments to Alawites, Druze, Christians, and Kurds helped the Assad regime survive.

26. Aziz takes and applies Anthony Smith's ethnosymbolist approach to national identity, whereas Vali hews to the more conventional "constructivist" approach to nationalism found among social scientists.

27. There have, however, been clashes between the Peshmerga and Shiite militias.

28. The most acerbic critics of the KRG, and of the KDP and the PUK, are found among Gorran supporters; a typical example of their rhetoric may be found in Hassan (2015). Sultanism, derived from Max Weber and referencing dictatorships, is not the correct political science category for the dominance of the KDP and the PUK (see Chehabi and Linz 1998). But the problems of nepotism and corruption within the KRG are genuine, and some advocate independence precisely to avoid the KRG becoming as mired in corruption as Arab-majority Iraq.

29. Romano (2014) provides an excellent account that requires one emendation: the supreme court mandated by the constitution has never been legislated. What is wrongly described as a supreme court by commentators is the transitional court established under the now superseded Transitional Administrative Law. Iraq has no validly constituted supreme court to arbitrate profound constitutional differences; one further example of its institutional shambles.

tonished that the Abadi government continued to pay the salaries of Iraqis in occupied Mosul ("taxed" by ISIS) while refusing to send Erbil its lawful share of Iraq's budget or to pay or arm the Peshmerga. In consequence, KDP Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani and his PUK deputy Qubad Talabani have overseen painful and unpopular austerity and economic reform programs. Impending sovereignty has increased the impetus for reform. Whatever the driving motivations may be, the Kurds of Iraq are scheduled to vote to leave Iraq. The referendum process will be used to incorporate the bulk of the disputed territories, including most of Kirkuk but not Hawija. These are the "known" futures that foreign ministries have to address. It is unknown what they plan to do in response, and here Turkey's role and that of the United States will be critical. No one currently expects the Trump administration's response to be other than improvised.

The KRG has a profound interest in its entente with Turkey, its principal non-oil foreign investor and, so far, the only reliable outlet for its oil and gas exports. Neither the KDP nor the PUK have ever supported the PKK—although the PUK and PKK are closer in founding ethos—and no love is lost between the three parties at the leadership level. If the KRG wishes to ease its path to independence, it must avoid all risks to its relationships with Turkey and work to achieve recognition from it. A successful bid for independence will mean the renunciation of territorial claims on Turkey, Syria, or Iran; expressing no vision of a Greater Kurdistan; and offering credible reassurances about the city government of Kirkuk (where a significant Turkoman minority remains) and consolidation of protections to all the microminorities in Kurdistan.³⁰

Turkey and the KRG Kurds have joint interests beyond oil and gas pipelines. They need each other to balance against Shia Islamist dominance in Baghdad and Tehran. Turkey has acknowledged that it benefits from having a stable and non-irredentist Kurdish neighbor. Erbil and Ankara have joint interests in strengthening the non-PYD Kurds in Syria, in seeing the PYD separate from the PKK, and in managing the massive flows of refugees from the Syrian civil war. These shared interests could be components of a joint approach to achieving a Syrian settlement, with Turkey as the guardian of the Sunni Arabs and the Turkmen, while the KRG would be the guardian of the Kurds and some of the Christians and Yazidis in the north and west. Turkey does not think the timing of the KRG's referendum is wise but has so far avoided saying absolutely "never." Its approach will be decided by President Erdoğan, who has been busy for over a year in

crushing an attempted Gulenist coup and governing under emergency decrees in which extraordinary purges of the public sector and repression of internal opposition has occurred, including of Turkish Kurds.

THE KURDS OF TURKEY: HOW MANY PEACES CAN A STATE PROCESS?

The field research in Orhan's *Political Violence and Kurds in Turkey* could not have been conducted today. Several cities in Turkey's Kurdish southeast are said to have been reduced to rubble, although with a media blackout such reports cannot be verified. By contrast, Orhan's doctoral thesis was supervised in Paris during a hopeful time in Turkish-Kurdish relations, when the AKP government and the PKK were in on-and-off negotiations about negotiations. As late as June 2015, there was an impressive showing in elections for the People's Democratic Party, Halkların Demokratik Partisi (HDP), largely a Kurdish party both in its extensive ties to the PKK and in its voting base. For the first time, it went significantly past the 10% threshold required for winning seats—a threshold designed by previous Turkish dictators to exclude Kurdish parties from parliamentary representation. The AKP also lost its governing majority, and negotiations began over the formation of a coalition government. The otherwise disunited Turkish opposition parties were determined to prevent the creation of an executive presidency—Erdoğan's central remaining constitutional ambition.

On July 20, 2015, however, an ISIS suicide bomber, a Turkish national who may have been of Kurdish origin, killed more than 30 people at a Kurdish political gathering held in favor of the Kurds of Syria in Suruc, near the Syrian border. Claiming that the "deep state" had a role in the bombing, the PKK responded by killing two policemen in the town of Ceylanpinar. There was no convincing proof of governmental involvement in the bombing; indeed, the PKK's decision was worse than a crime, it was a blunder (unless one assumes, as some Kurds half-jokingly say, that the PKK is run by Turkish intelligence). In August Erdoğan brought the coalition negotiations to an abrupt end and called a snap election to take place on November 1, after a summer in which over 100 Turkish security officials, far more PKK militants, and an unknown number of civilians were killed. In October ISIS attacked again in Ankara: two suicide bombers, one Turkish the other Syrian, killed over 100 people at a pro-peace rally.

The PKK, by taking the bait, had given Erdoğan what he had needed to restore his party's electoral dominance. The wave of violent instability pushed frightened Turkish voters back toward a single-party government. The AKP won a mandate to govern until 2019 and was subsequently able to exploit the defeat of the Gulenist coup to push through en-

30. On Kirkuk, see Anderson (2013) and Anderson and Stansfield (2009).

hancements of presidential executive power and other major constitutional amendments in April 2017. The HDP's vote fell in 2016, although it just scraped over the 10% threshold. Along with the other opposition, it has so far been unable to block Erdoğan's reconstruction of Turkey.

Readers of Orhan's book will learn that the PKK has often shown strategic ineptitude, if assessed from the perspective of Kurdish collective interests. Its insurgency, from 1984 until the late 1990s, led to the mass destruction and forced evacuation of thousands of Kurdish villages, although the Turkish authorities are responsible for these gross human rights violations. The PKK's latest decision to return to war similarly displayed scant regard for collateral damage to Kurdish civilians, let alone Turks, and it has jeopardized the political projects of the Kurds of Syria, Iraq, and Turkey. The master key to explaining the PKK's actions, if my reading of Orhan's work is correct, is its continuous insistence on being the monopolist of Kurdish interests wherever it organizes. The party emerged from a bloody war of attrition among microparties on the Turkish and Kurdish Left between the late 1970s and early 1980s—in which every local cleavage, tribal, sectarian, generational, and linguistic was exploited with scant regard for political principle. Recently the PKK has seemed to fear both that the HDP would slip out of its sphere of influence and make a settlement with the AKP and that urban Kurdish youth (often the children of those expelled from their villages by the Turkish army) would go it alone. In short, the PKK may have gone back to war not in a tit-for-tat attack on the deep state, or to aid the PYD by opening another front, but rather to try to resecure its monopoly, hoping later to be invited to the negotiating table as the sole representative of Kurdish interests. In its zealous eradication of rivals within its own ethnic group, in its militarist feminism, in its use of suicide bombers, in its cultlike qualities, and even perhaps in its overestimation of its military capabilities, the PKK bears an astonishing resemblance to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).³¹ Time will tell whether it will face a similar demise.³² Whether the PKK can be bludgeoned into renewing its cease-fire or persuaded into sharing politics with other Kurds perhaps remains an open question. Its past performance is not promising.

Orhan's account has many valuable vignettes of violence, but it is not for the faint-hearted, not just because of the grizzly tales therein but because it is a stylistic mess—he personally

translated his political sociology thesis written in French. Routledge should have supplied much greater editorial assistance. As readers of this review may have already experienced, trying to navigate a forest of acronyms of Kurdish organizations that resemble the parties satirized in Monty Python's *Life of Brian* is hard enough. But when the author uses Foucault, Bourdieu, and the usual suspects for guides while moving between two languages that are not his mother tongue, the prose is sometimes excruciating. Even the book's title misleads—one expects an account of the violence of the Turkish state against Kurds as well as of violence against the state and others by Kurdish rebels. In any such treatment, the government would be judged the killer of the greater number. Orhan, however, shares much with recent US students of civil wars, who are often more interested in infighting among rebel organizations, and their use and abuse of their civilian constituents, than they are in the contest between the state and rebels. This focus on intra-rebel and intra-ethnic violence is sometimes morally salutary but often skates over deep methodological problems, especially the bias in media reports and official sources, which usually tilt toward governments rather than rebels. This type of focus sometimes occludes the big picture. The PKK is both a major cause of conflict and, as currently constituted, a major roadblock to the democratic reconstruction of Turkey and its neighbors. But its existence and its nature are also the results of decades of Turkish repression.

LESSONS FROM MAHABAD IN IRAN?

Iran will be a decisive player in what unfolds for Kurds and Kurdistan(s), even if its own Kurds remain quiescent in the decade ahead. Whereas the Erdoğan administration has sometimes signaled that it may accommodate an independent Kurdish state emerging from the KRG, Iran has never given any equivalent notice. Tehran's counsel will be given to the Shia-dominated rump regime in Baghdad, which is asking itself whether it should recognize an independent Kurdistan; accept a confederal reconstruction of Iraqi space; or refuse recognition, starve the KRG of its budgetary entitlements, and even fight to keep the Kurds within Iraq? Prime Minister Abadi has ruled out the latter option; whether the Shiite militias will follow this injunction remains to be seen.

Safavid Iran like Ottoman Turkey used Kurds as buffers. Old diplomatic hands expect KDP Kurds, strongest in Dohuk and Erbil, to be pitted against PUK/Gorran Kurds, strongest in Sulaimania and in Kirkuk. In time-honored fashion, they expect that each party faction will become a client of its most proximate neighbor: the axis of conflict would be the government of Iran and PUK (and Gorran) versus the KDP and the government of Turkey, with the rival intelligence services supporting the two different faces of the PKK/PJAK.

31. For PKK and LTTE comparisons, see Ergil (2007) and O'Duffy (2007).

32. There is at least one major difference in the trajectories of the PKK and the LTTE: Öcalan is alive in a Turkish prison and formally has abandoned a Greater Kurdistan, a federal region for Kurds within Turkey, and, nominally at least, seeking any kind of state (Öcalan 2007, 296–97).

This scenario can be avoided, but a great deal will depend on whether and how Kurds settle their current internal disputes within what may become the future Republic of South Kurdistan. Successful power sharing within and among Duhok, Erbil, Sulaimania, and Kirkuk is essential for a viable bid for independence to succeed.

Iran withstood and welcomed the American removal of Saddam Hussein, but after Iranian overtures to the Bush administration were rejected,³³ Iran's intelligence services determined to make Iraq ungovernable during the US occupation and to consolidate Shia power in Baghdad. These aims have largely been secured, although they were unsettled by the eruption of ISIS. The question now is whether Iran wishes to keep western Iraq and eastern Syria in permanent war, feeding its tribes and militias with money and weapons, or will it cash in its chips? The latter policy would avoid a complete loss in Syria but leave it without a significant Sunni Arab power on its western flank. For Iran that may be a price worth settling for.

Iran could coexist with known Kurdish quantities in the KRG with whom the regime has long historic and personal ties. But independent Kurdish polities have had extinction experiences at the hands of Iranian regimes (including in Safavid times). The most recent occasion was in 1946 when Kurds declared an independent republic in northwest Iran. The Mahabad Republic was the Kurds first experience of self-rule in modern times. Although short-lived, the republic had a formative influence on subsequent Kurdish nationalist movements: it was here, for example, that Mulla Mustafa Barzani cut his teeth as a general. In his generally very clear book, Vali disputes the established view that the Republic was the result of a Soviet conspiracy to dismember Iran or a mere side effect of the maneuvers between the three major victors of World War II—the British, the Americans, and the Soviets. He suggests that internal Iranian, Azeri, and Kurdish developments led to the Republic, and he provides a well-documented account of internal Kurdish differences (particularly urban-rural and tribal-nontribal cleavages). Vali argues that the republic's formation was the culmination of the development of a new Kurdish national identity within Iran, one that had emerged in response to the exclusionary politics of the centralizing polity Iran had become, that is, a reaction to coercive "Persianization" and (Twelver) "Shi'afication." Here one may quibble with the author, however. The Kurdish identity was already in being, as Aziz would say. What was novel was its diffusion across both urban and rural classes and its democratization.

Vali has mastery of Persian and Kurdish and has accessed and deployed the primary sources in these languages,

but he does not appear to have explored Azeri or Russian archival sources and appears to have used second-hand American archival sources through a seminar paper. He is less clear when he uses the idioms of poststructuralism—like many political theorists he appears to hold the disabling belief that facts are both relative and right wing. These epistemic beliefs inhibit him from making strong claims to have established the truth as to what transpired in the making and the breaking of the Mahabad Republic. The Mahabad Republic was destroyed after the Soviet withdrawal, and its captured leaders were hung as traitors. "Kurdish identity, language and culture were suppressed with unprecedented force and vehemence," writes Vali (136). He argues that naiveté about liberal democratic constitutionalism is among the lessons to be learned by the successors of Mahabad. Other pertinent lessons are that small polities can be crushed after the withdrawal of a great power from a world region, especially internally divided small polities without unified security forces.

DOES HECHTER'S LATEST EVOLUTION IN HIS WORLDVIEW HELP?

In *The Future of Kurdistan in Iraq*, Khaled Salih and I argued that one way to explain the development of Kurdish nationalism in Iraq was through Michael Hechter's emphasis on the repercussions of the switch from indirect rule in premodern states to direct rule under modern states (see O'Leary and Salih 2005), a perspective usefully compatible with Ernest Gellner's account of the differences between the agro-literate polity and the modern nation-state (O'Leary 1998). In *Alien Rule*, the subtleties and scope of which cannot be treated here, Hechter provides a one-chapter account of what became Iraq from late Ottoman times until today. He is highly reliant on Charles Tripp's (2007) *History of Iraq*, in which Kurdistan is largely a sideshow, but has no difficulty in showing that increased state penetration over the last century deeply disturbed previous intergroup relations between Shiites, Sunnis, and Kurds or in showing that their collective predicaments were subsequently exacerbated by the fact that no subsequent post-Ottoman regime—British, Hashemite, republican, Baathist, American, or Shia led—was credibly able to provide state services impartially across ethnic and sectarian groups to deliver both legitimacy and effectiveness. It is not clear, however, that any regime in Iraq genuinely attempted to pursue such an ideal.

Like Gellner, Hechter believes that in modern times "alien rule" is intrinsically difficult, but unlike Gellner, Hechter thinks it is sociologically possible. Hechter recognizes that both of the British occupations (of the 1920s and the 1940s) and the US-led occupation (of 2003–11) of Iraq were neither

33. See the fascinating account in Parsi (2007, appendixes, 341ff.).

planned nor run to ensure impartiality. Yet he seems to hold a strong residual conviction that impartial alien rule was possible. Tellingly, regional geopolitics plays little role in his discussion of the historiography, and equally tellingly, he accepts that successful neo-trusteeship would have been very expensive and would have had to last longer, and he knows that the United States had few incentives to follow such a project. In one line Hechter dismisses as “mistaken” Galbraith’s (2006) argument that a proper multinational federation should have been encouraged by the Coalition Provisional Authority (74). It is, however, Hechter who is mistaken. He reports not a single case of successful international trusteeship in the postcolonial world that has established, or reestablished, a centralized state that treats each major national or ethnic group fairly unless it is accompanied by multinational federal or consociational institutions (which he does not discuss). Hechter misapplies a deep insight, namely, the contrast between indirect rule in *agraria* and direct rule in *industria*. He is correct to argue that there is a place for arbitration (decision-making roles for external third parties, persons, and institutions) in the regulation and perhaps the resolution of national and ethnic conflicts and to observe that alien rule was more pervasive in the past and that it has not disappeared in the present, but he errs in missing multinational and consociational forms of government from his overly large canvas. He misses them because his conception of alien rule is too capacious. If my nation is a member of a multinational federation, proportionally present in its representative institutions, with full parity of status, am I being ruled by aliens, or am I sharing rule with partners? The answer can sometimes be the latter. Likewise, in a consociation jointness is the key norm.³⁴

Either constructive Syrian and Iraqi futures and the future of their respective Kurds will be highly confederal, or the formation of new nation-states will be inevitable; Iraq hovers close to the threshold of survival. The grimmer scenario of the continuing destruction of the contending parties is not to be precluded. But any fresh bouts of alien rule in Kurdish lands in Iraq or Syria will be either acts of conquest (under Turkish, Iranian, or Arab invasions) or brief and functionally specific (e.g., the UN field organizations). It is impossible to imagine an international trusteeship that would be able to meet Hechter’s standards of service provision over either Syria or Iraq. By contrast, Turkey and Iran will have to accommodate “their Kurds” as Kurds or else resolve to pursue roughly another century of coercive assimilation (another form of alien rule) with all of its most likely consequences.

Regrettably, the theses of *Alien Rule* may be abused in favor of paternalistic neo-trusteeships or to license support for future (nonconsensual) recentralization projects that are exceptionally unlikely to deliver the model of a just, impartial, and integrated civic state. But Hechter should be read: he is terse and never dull.

CONCLUSION

Robert W. Olson recently compared the prospects of current Kurdish nationalism with those of Jewish nationalism from the 1880s until 1948. Weak Arab polities under colonial rule from 1917 until 1948, he argued, facilitated the Zionists’ ambitions. By contrast, the predicament of the Iraqi Kurds after 1992 was “quite different and more challenging. . . . Turkey, Iran and Syria are larger, more populous and more powerful than the Lebanon, Jordan and Syria of the 1920s and 1930s.” The United States has favorable relations with some states surrounding the Kurds of Iraq, such as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, “but it has less influence over Iran or Syria and limited influence with Turkey. It seems unlikely that US support for the Kurds of Iraq and for Kurdish nationalism in Iran, Turkey and Syria will be as enduring as Britain’s support for Zionism” (Olson 2010, 27–28).

It was an instructive comparison, but since it was written both Syria and Iraq have entered prolonged civil wars. We await what follows. The Kurds, the world’s largest nation without a sovereign state, and the fourth largest nation in the Middle East, currently have two de facto states: the one in Iraq being more institutionalized than that in Syria. We will see whether these Kurdish polities severally or jointly have the power to refuse “to return to the old formula of ad hoc co-option and intimidation by the center” (Tripp 2007, 321). Those who watch Kurds in Western foreign offices may consider a paraphrase from an old poem: “Thou shalt not kill states, but needst not strive officiously to keep them alive.”³⁵ Or, they may choose to stand idly by and allow a strange parallel “victory”: an Iranian (and Russian) victory that keeps the Assad regime in power *and* an Iranian (and American) victory that keeps the Baghdad Shia in power. Should this scenario emerge, it would be hailed as the defeat of ISIS, but it would be at the expense of the Kurds (and Sunni Arabs). If so, a general rebalancing against Iran may then become the next order of business. The fate of the Kurds therefore remains within the maw of the great powers and of the two most powerful wolves, Turkey and Iran. Iran’s scarcely disguised aspiration to run the two lamed wolves,

34. For a cautious defense of consociation, see O’Leary (2005), and of multinational federations, see McGarry and O’Leary (2009).

35. To adapt Clough’s “The Latest Decalogue.” See Clough (1968, 60–61).

Iraq and Syria, as client states looks like imperial overreach. We can, however, be sure of one matter: the definitive history of Kurdish nationalism must be postponed until Kurds have at least one recognized state—one of their own or within an as yet unmade confederation.

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